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ABSTRACT

Presentations at this conference dealt with the transformation of the child welfare system through community partnerships, and the presenters explore various aspects of forming partnerships among public agencies and community organizations. There are some excellent examples of such partnerships, but evaluation findings on "best practice" models are now required. The premise that the concepts in community partnerships will transform child welfare into a responsive and responsible system awaits reliable data. The following papers are included: (1) "Opportunities and Challenges in Forming Community Partnerships To Protect Children" (Patricia Schene); (2) "Commentary: Federal Initiatives" (Cecilia Sudia); (3) "Response: Crafting a Community Partnership" (Tony Wagner, Steven Oates, and Brian Guidera); (4) "Community Partnerships in Child Welfare: Challenges in Sharing Authority and Accountability" (Charles Lindsey Usher); (5) "A Perspective from Families" (Anne Hill); (6) "A Thriving Partnership: CLUES (Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio) and Ramsey County Human Services" (Jesse Bethke and Jenny Gordon); and (6) "Concluding Remarks" (Esther Wattenberg).

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Rethinking Child Welfare:

Can the System Be Transformed through Community Partnerships?

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A summary of proceedings of the symposium held June 3, 1997 at the University of Minnesota

edited by Esther Wattenberg and Yvonne Pearson

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Rethinking Child Welfare:

Can the System Be Transformed through Community Partnerships?

June 3, 1997

A symposium sponsored by
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Foreword

Esther Wattenberg
Director, Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, School of Social Work, and Associate, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota

A community-based child welfare system rests on an assumption that there are unlimited opportunities to assure a child's well-being at the intersection of a troubled family and the community in which the family lives.

Patricia Schene outlines a powerful array of challenges to this assumption. In the current context of a changing child welfare system, a diverse set of social forces require the redesign of our staggering child welfare system: welfare reform, managed care, devolution—the federal withdrawal of resources and the state's shaky response to county and local fiscal crises—and the blurring of organizational boundaries. The extent to which community partnerships can provide the basis of a redesign is yet to be fully tested and acknowledged.

Central to our concerns for the safety of children is the phenomenon of the "funnel." This is a well-recognized feature of child protection, wherein the voluminous reports of maltreated children dwindle into a trickle of cases opened for services. Screening out cases to narrow the numbers of families and children to be served is pervasive.

Schene has captured the impact of a limited public response to reports of malteated children in a terse statement: "We might argue that CPS has become adept at calibrating its response to meet its capacity."

This is a frank appraisal of the complex and discrete use of public authority. How local communities respond to the narrowing of the public response in the child protection sphere is not clearly understood. Experiments abound. It is important to note that almost all models are created to *supplement* the public system, not to *replace* it.

Aspects of initiatives supported by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation are worth noting: a neighborhood-based system, usually located in a school setting; the invention of a family resource center; proactive outreach; clinical practice innovation; use of a non-formal system of support; focus on domestic violence and substance abuse.

Schene's outline of characteristics of partnerships between the public authority and the informal and formal resources of local communities indicates a bold and optimistic framework for assuring the safety of children in high risk situations. Schene's paper outlines a well-grounded set of principles for this work in progress.

Sudia provides an astute reminder that each wave of child welfare reform has offered cycles of invention to be followed by periods of the system's indifference or amnesia.

Community partnerships provide us with a period of promising experimentation, and examples of excellence are now appearing. The challenge of identifying "best practices" and "best policy changes" is before us.

While there are wide variations in the flourishing environment of experiments in community partnerships, at least one unified component has emerged—specific outcomes must be delineated in the proposals. These are typically related to prevention: less restrictive care for children; safety; and permanency placements. Usher points out that while these concepts are not new, the major new initiative is the development of evaluation in order to secure better information on performance indicators. Usher makes the point that a new kind of evaluation is required because the initiatives are "complex, involving family outcomes and bundled interventions that are specific to particular communities." Self-evaluation, building longitudinal databases, and evaluation teams are now required. Developing a shared perception of the definition of abuse and neglect is one of the challenges.

Capturing information on the complex negotiation of authority between the child welfare system and the community is a formidable evaluation challenge. However, Usher reminds us that at the heart of this negotiation process is the issue of accountability, "...there will be no transfer of authority without accountability..."

The outlook for an investment in evaluation is dim. Usher observes that at times of restricted resources, organizational priority to place resources into those components that have direct impact on families and children is irresistible. Yet, evaluation—an ongoing process that involves mid-course corrections and continuous improvements in outcomes—is essential if we are to maintain the momentum of creating community partnerships and support the legitimacy of the movement.

Panel respondents spoke to the local realities facing a community-based system:

First and foremost was a sense that there has been an historic mistrust enmeshed in the relationship between community-based agencies and county governments. This uneasiness is anchored in the "power" which shapes the relationship: the county's role as financier and community agency's status as "client."

Further, contracting agencies are enmeshed in rumors of impending changes which fuel the anxieties of staffs of community agencies. The uncertainty of contract negotiations and the shifting emphasis and requirements of accountability, as measured in "outcomes" and "results," is part of the reality of the partnership landscape.

Nevertheless, alliances are being forged, and there are excellent examples of strong and creative work between public social services and community agencies. What is now required are evaluation findings on "best models of practice" in community-based governance.

The premise that the concepts in community partnerships will transform child welfare into a responsive and responsible system awaits reliable data.

Opportunities and Challenges in Forming Community Partnerships to Protect Children

Patricia Schene, Ph.D.
Consultant on community partnerships for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation; and Executive Session Member, New Paradigms for Child Protective Services, Kennedy School of Public Affairs, Harvard University, Cambridge.

Synopsis: Schene's presentation addressed the following points: placing the community partnerships effort into the context of the child welfare environment, including its shortcomings and the common vision of its reform; highlighting specific initiatives of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation aimed at building community partnerships; outlining opportunities and challenges involved in building community partnerships; discussing approaches to building accountability and rigor into the implementation processes; and suggesting strategies for leveraging change.

Schene began her presentation by noting that child welfare reforms have often been inadequately examined, embraced too quickly for all families and children, or not implemented with enough thoroughness. This has led to a greater emphasis on evaluation of process and outcome, and "a recognition that there is 'no one right way' to organize community partnerships. ...Rather than providing 'blueprints for reform,' neighborhoods and communities have been encouraged and funded to put together the partnerships, processes, and decision-making bodies that best fit their situations. At the same time, many of these efforts at community partnerships have committed to a set of specified outcomes that are the bottom line—the criteria for judging achievement."

She said that a number of initiatives in recent years are helpful in illuminating both the opportunities and the challenges of building community systems. She noted that her "small contribution today is to try to put this idea [of transforming the system through community partnerships] into a larger context, exploring what we hope to gain from involving communities in partnerships to protect children and also pointing out the logical and emerging challenges involved in going in that direction."

The Context of the Changing Child Welfare Environment

Schene elaborated on five aspects of the changing child welfare environment.

1. *The shared understanding of the shortcomings of our existing system of child protection.* The most commonly reported shortcomings nationwide include: a system that is "too

adversarial, and unable to differentiate their response to fit the situation—all cases accepted get the same investigation or assessment; all seem to require some decision regarding the 'proof' or confirmability of the allegations, not services. The authorative intervention of a child protection agency often gets screened in, and those who do need protection are often screened out arbitrarily (for reasons of age, for example); too few children are actually protected or helped by available services unless removed; caseloads are too high, supervision is not adequate, and staff are not sufficiently trained to work well with community resources; we intervene too late and offer families and children too little."

2. *The child welfare reform agenda.* "The consensus reform agenda is committed to:
   - earlier intervention with troubled families; we cannot wait for a report of child maltreatment to offer help;
   - engaging the whole family in services and not focusing solely on the protection of the child;
   - looking carefully at the *outcomes* of our intervention and being accountable for good outcomes, not just process measures;
   - building community systems of care for children and families, where more of the real stakeholders are invested in the process;
   - focusing on a full assessment of the situation identified to child protection services, rather than simply an 'investigation' of the report; and
   - learning to use the natural networks of family, kinship, cultural and ethnic identity, neighborhoods and faith communities as resources to protect children and strengthen families."

3. *The general devolution of responsibility for protecting children from the federal government to states, counties, local communities and neighborhoods.* "This trend is motivated by many forces. The Family Preservation and Support Act (1993) initiated community planning processes at more local levels. The potential of block grants for federal funding is associated with the need for more local initiatives on designing and funding services to children and families. There have been increasing state and local demands in recent years for greater autonomy and flexibility in using federal/state resources. Moreover, there is growing recognition that any "solutions" to the problems of child abuse and neglect have to involve a variety of family, neighborhoods, and community supports that have to be based on more localized governance capacity. Minnesota is well positioned for this devolution in that you have a long tradition of state support for services to children and families and also of county-led initiatives in child welfare."

4. *A growing recognition that the formal resource and funding base will probably not be growing over the next several years.* "We therefore need to find better ways to use existing resources (many states now allow the transfer of out-of-home placement dollars to support in-home or community-based initiatives). We also need to reach out to a large group of potential partners or stakeholders in the form of community agencies and resources to protect children. There are some of us who believe that if a larger group of stakeholders are involved there might be an increased willingness to invest additional resources in the future to accomplish specific purposes."

5. *The CPS paradox.* "CPS is serving many children and families who might be better served elsewhere while not reaching many of the children who need protection from abuse and neglect. Many of the most serious cases of child abuse and neglect are "not reported, [are] screened out, or [are] not serviced even if substantiated."

"The U.S. Advisory Board reported last year that 60 percent of known fatalities due to abuse and neglect involved children not known to CPS. The National Incidence Study (NIS) data (of cases known to key professionals in representative communities which may or may not be reported to CPS) reported that the total number of children seriously injured or clearly endangered due to abuse or neglect quadrupled between 1986 and 1993. Using the stricter NIS standard of 'experiencing harm' from abuse and neglect, there were 66 percent more children harmed in 1993 compared to 1986. CPS only investigated 28 percent of recognized children who met the 'harm' standard—down from 44 percent in 1986. It is significant that the actual number of children investigated by CPS remained constant as the number of children harmed increased dramatically. We might argue that CPS has become adept at calibrating its response to meet its capacity."

In Hennepin County, "of 37,887 calls in 1994, 5,812 resulted in 'investigations,' of these, 2,077 were confirmed, and of these, 503 cases were open for services. Apparently the funnel has become narrower in recent years. Many people in this community are alarmed at the seriousness of the cases that are not investigated or confirmed or open for services. If all of these cases were receiving effective alternative responses, I am sure the concerns would be less pronounced."

Summarizing the context of the changing child welfare environment, Schene said, "All of these broad areas—the shortcomings of our CPS systems, the child welfare reform agenda, the general devolution of responsibility for child protection, the limited public resources base, and the CPS paradox—are part of the environmental context of public child welfare as we address the opportunities and challenges of building community partnerships."

Highlights of Some Emerging Characteristics of the Clark Foundation Community Partnership Sites

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation initiative, begun two years ago, is currently focused on specific neighborhoods in four cities—Louisville, St. Louis, Jacksonville, and Cedar Rapids. Some aspects of the initiatives which promote a more effective response system include:

- *Neighborhood-based in a specific place.* All four sites have at last one specific place or hub within a neighborhood where the work of the initiative is located, usually a school or family resource center.
- *Proactive outreach.* "...for early intervention and prevention hopefully before there is a substantiated report of child maltreatment." Schene gave examples from each of the four cities.

  Cedar Rapids. There are thirteen family support workers jointly funded through a consortium of agencies. The workers have enhanced access to important supports such as priority enrollment in day care or after school programs, and reach out to at-risk families in target neighborhoods. They develop ongoing relationships with twenty to thirty families per worker. There are also neighborhood partners—twenty-five volun-

teers who have small stipends, who are neighborhood residents, and who support families with child care, organizing community gatherings, and connecting isolated families to other families in the neighborhoods.

Jacksonville. They have a First Call program in which all reports to Florida's child abuse hotline from targeted neighborhoods in Jacksonville that are not accepted for investigation will be electronically transferred to First Call—an enhanced information and referral resource in the community—while the caller remains on the line. First Call then connects the targeted families to their full service school for outreach by a family liaison worker (a paid paraprofessional) or a member of the full service school's integrated services team of more formal human service providers.

St. Louis. Family support centers offer a mix of formal and informal services ranging from parent support groups, respite child care, and housing assistance, to youth programs. Community canvassing was done by parent volunteers in the neighborhoods, knocking on doors and identifying needs and resources.

Louisville. Community resource teams—formal agency representatives, paraprofessionals, and volunteers recruited from the targeted neighborhoods—receive direct calls from the community on at-risk families as well as on diverted CPS reports. They arrange outreach and try to connect families to existing resources.

- *Clinical practice innovations.* Again, Schene gave examples.

  St. Louis. There are family support teams for high risk cases in CPS. The focus of the intervention is primarily on assuring the safety of the children.

  Louisville. All CPS staff and community resource teams in the targeted neighborhoods will use "solution-based casework." This clinical approach focuses on relapse prevention through strength-based assessments leading to the identification of concrete behavioral changes needed. Targeted interventions are then used to support those behavioral changes.

- *Use of non-formal systems of support.* Great emphasis is placed on the network of relationships and associations that children and families have or could develop within their own community. These include extended family, friends, neighbors, guidance counselors, members of their faith community, parents associations, teams, etc.

  Jacksonville. More than 200 "Community Support Agreements"—written agreements among the CPS system, the parent, and a particular resource person identified by the parent—have been signed. These agreements are used when the public system has found child maltreatment and some need for continuing monitoring, but is not about to remove the child. The voluntary agreement involves people such as the minister of the church the parent attends, the resident director of a public housing project, the landlord of a trailer park, extended family members, etc. "CPS does do follow-up on these agreements and commits to be available if needed."

- *Focus on domestic violence and substance abuse.* The sites are "forging alliances and integration of interventions across child welfare, domestic violence shelters, and substance abuse treatment services."

Opportunities and Challenges

Schene said, "It is important to note that the growing recognition of the need for community involvement was not to *replace* CPS, but to supplement the public system, divert some cases from CPS involvement when they can better be served with another community resource, and to work in partnership with public child welfare on cases that may remain with CPS."

She discussed opportunities associated with building community partnerships for child protection with a summary of what is expected to change when these partnerships are in place.

- The community will share the responsibility with the formal child protection agency for responding to child abuse and neglect.
- There will be a greater focus on family assessment and the mobilization of community supports and services as the initial response, and less on the investigation of maltreatment allegations.
- "CPS will be working more collaboratively in consultative roles with community agencies and neighborhoods."
- Parents will experience CPS as less adversarial, more helpful, and more responsive to their input.
- There will be multiple tracks of response related to "1) the severity of the maltreatment; 2) the willingness of parents to participate; and 3) the availability of resources for the assurance of child safety within the family and the community."
- "CPS will no longer be the sole *gatekeeper* for all services to abused and neglected children and their families."
- "The total quantity of accessible supports and services to children and families for the prevention of initial or continued child maltreatment, earlier intervention, and enhancement of child well-being will grow—tapping on both voluntary private help by families, neighbors, etc. as well as more formal agencies' involvement."
- "Children will be less likely to be initially or repeatedly abused or neglected."
- "The local community as a whole will increase their own decision-making capacity around identifying needs, allocating resources, and tracking results."

Schene enumerated the following challenges:

- Preparing current staff for different roles. "As the work of CPS changes, we have to be very careful to prepare current staff for different roles with the community and to facilitate the processes of communication as well as training for the new roles. Many staff are concerned that they will no longer have job security; they do not believe others can truly protect children; they are not used to collaborative decision-making; they often resist being assigned exclusively to certain neighborhoods, etc. Many others welcome the changing roles and the partners, but need to have clarity on how to proceed on a case by case basis. Shortchanging this process of working with staff... will greatly undermine the work of building community partnerships."
- Mobilizing community organizations and nonformal systems. "We cannot underestimate the enormity of the task of identifying, developing, and mobilizing community organizations and nonformal systems in neighborhoods to take on these responsibili-

ties. ...Many appear willing to do so, but energy and resources need to be applied to make this a reality."

- Using information technology within the larger community partnership. "We need to take aggressive advantage of existing and developing information systems technology to support community systems of child protection. This will require us to move well beyond current concepts of SACWIS (the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System). At the same time we certainly cannot lose any of our current capacity to identify abused/neglected children by moving to a community partnership. Information technology can and must reach that larger community partnership to not only track vulnerable children, but also to generate information on needs and outcomes for community governance."
- Identifying incentives and resources to sustain the voluntary commitments that are vital to nonformal systems.
- Continually calibrating the formal response system with the availability of the nonformal. Because informal supports for protecting children are variable in communities over time, formal intervention resources must provide a reliable backup in a calibrated fashion. "This represents a much more complex and discrete use of public authority than we have current models for in human services."
- Developing with flexibility accountability mechanisms for less formal community systems.
- Developing new governance structures to identify community needs, resources, patterns of support mobilization, and accountability frameworks.
- Determining how to ensure that the "coercive" system is brought in when the safety of children cannot be assured by the actions of the less formal community resources.
- Exploring the role of the community in assuring child safety. "To overstate the dichotomy, are we saying that for many children who are already maltreated or at risk, we have decided that coercive intervention is not relevant? Does that translate to *no public responsibility* in the future for many current CPS cases—but simply a hope to connect them to community supports without a real assurance of help? Or, hopefully, on the other hand, do we undertake to build, support and sustain a reliable, viable, non-adversarial community partnership as a *public* service with some governmental resources in partnership with private and non-formal resources?"
- Developing a "shared sense of the *legitimacy* of community standards for parenting and child protection as well as the *expectation* that some action or consequence will occur to authoritatively communicate the standard."

Rigor and Accountability

Schene asserted the need for a framework to help us judge whether protections for children from abuse and neglect are improved. "This framework would at minimum be built upon 1) defining some *key common elements* that would begin to characterize an effective community system of child protection, and 2) having a clear set of *outcomes* related to the safety of children to measure against.

She outlined how this exists in the Clark Foundation initiatives. All Clark sites are asked to address four common elements in their implementation initiatives. They are:

- Written safety plans for individual children at great risk, outlining the commitments of parents, extended family, nonformal resources, and formal providers.
- Practice and policy changes within CPS. This involves "working toward a differential response to reports of child abuse and neglect; aggressive tracking and intervention for cases with multiple reports or those at high risk of subsequent maltreatment; a role for CPS as a consultant on child safety to the community...; and a willingness to develop a process for sharing decisions about child protection with the community on both cases that remain in CPS as well as those diverted from CPS."
- A neighborhood network of public and private agencies, informal community supports, parents, and community institutions. "There must be changes in the roles of agencies and community institutions such as schools, mental health agencies, churches, recreation programs, parent groups, etc. play. These changed roles will involve increased capacity to respond effectively as well as better coordination of the response."
- Community ownership and accountability for child safety. A formal governance capacity needs to involve features such as a "neighborhood-based decision-making board, a comprehensive community plan for child safety, and resources and processes for self-evaluation and accountability."

"The Clark Foundation has three clear and deceptively simple outcomes all four sites are required to address and measure," Schene said.

- "Children in the neighborhoods targeted by the initiative will be less likely to be abused or neglected."
- "Children who come to the attention of CPS will be less likely to be re-abused or continually neglected."
- "The rate of serious injury to children due to abuse and neglect will decrease."

These outcomes are all in terms of child safety. "All other changes envisioned in building community partnerships are means to this end. ...All the outcomes are cast in terms of changes for children, not systems or processes. Additionally, all clearly require data for measurement that are not now readily available even in our SACWIS-enhanced information systems, and, indeed, go beyond the range of information any child welfare system would logically cover."

Strategies and Conclusions

Schene said that leadership in public child welfare must develop more comprehensive agendas to leverage change through a variety of integrated strategies. "This would involve taking advantage of diverse forces such as welfare reform, the emergence of managed care, community and neighborhood agendas, the presence of many more stakeholders in child welfare, advancing capacity to measure interventions and outcomes, and the general blurring of organizational boundaries in human services, to name but a few."

She noted that every state department of social services is feeling the need for a focused strategy to mobilize resources for children and families. "Redesign of the statutory and resource framework for child welfare is underway in many states as responsibilities and resources devolve."

She said there is a greater need "to define specific core services resources that would be available in every community that could be folded into the program strategies and the processes of local planning and mobilization of citizen involvement."

We need to make better use of information systems technology to a) do the work of child welfare more collaboratively and efficiently; and b) to support local decision-making with information on who we are reaching, who we are missing, and the outcomes for children and families.

"There is an acute need to set the agenda that a managed care contract addresses and use managed care instrumentally rather than responding simply to what providers offer in privatizing current public service configurations."

It is important to "identify indigenous leadership and build on the work being done in the community"...; "to proactively recruit more concerned citizens and sustaining their participation"; and to have "neighborhood-based data on needs, resources, and outcomes."

It is also helpful "to consider the kinds of messages that will be part of a multifaceted communications strategy to engage communities, build public support, and articulate the kinds of commitments needed from parents, families, communities, and public and private agencies to keep our children safe and to strengthen their families."

Finally, Schene said, "In conclusion, we are all working in a rapidly changing environment. There are many opportunities as well as challenges we face as we move toward community-based partnerships. An agenda based on how this can improve our response to vulnerable children, as well as a willingness to exercise leadership in designing and participating in community partnerships for protecting children is very much needed.

Surrounding the initiatives is a culture of learning together—there seems to be a broad commitment to understanding what facilitates and hinders the effectiveness of community partnerships. Coming full circle, we are operationalizing our commitment to careful scrutiny. The three major national foundations in child welfare—Clark, Casey, and Kellogg—are all funding neighborhood and community work in some aspect of child welfare. They just sponsored a joint meeting to share what they are learning. The McKnight Foundation here in the Twin Cities has been accumulating evaluative information on their community outreach initiatives and has been very willing to involve local leaders and a national advisory committee to contribute to and discuss the implications of the findings. In short, the culture supports asking the hard questions of community partnerships, and supporting the analytic work that can help us understand what progress was made on what outcomes and even why or why not."

The important question is not whether or not we should pursue community partnerships for the protection of children—and in that process—we should involve more of the community in real investments in their own children. The important questions are how to make that happen, what is needed to both mobilize and sustain community involvement, what exactly does the partnership between CPS and the community consist of, what specific resources and operational relations need to be in place, and under what conditions is the safety and well being of children and families advanced."

Commentary: Federal Initiatives

Cecilia Sudia
Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.

Synopsis: Sudia reviewed statistics regarding protection of children and advocated that community partnerships include a broad array of related service systems. She also noted that it is important to be aware that national programs which address child welfare are fractured, in part, because they reflect the perspective of various professions.

Sudia spoke, initially, of her increasing concern regarding "the cyclical nature of welfare reform efforts in this country... In the 1960s, we had the War on Poverty, and I worked on a project here at the University, with Esther Wattenberg and others, which included organizing low-income families. In fact, it was that experience which particularly qualified me for my job with the Children's Bureau as an 'expert' on low-income families. Now, thirty or so years later, we are again having a major review of these same issues... This state also [had] one other earlier program of community and agency coordination to address the problems of families and children. That was the St. Paul Project, which occurred in the 1950s and was nationally acclaimed at the time."

Sudia went on to say that she thinks we should "review these efforts, and see whether there are indications of why some programs survive, and others are phased out early. Social Security, Unemployment Assistance, and the AFDC program were products of the 1930s. Head Start is the major, and still popular outcome of the '60s. Community Action Programs still exist, but with much reduced activities, while the legal services programs have been reduced and reduced. Can we identify the aspects which have made some programs popular and untouchable as compared to those which were either failures or political liabilities? The recent dialogue has focused on state versus federal, but this is surely an oversimplification. The most we can say, at present, is that Minnesota should include a final objective in the implementation plan. Insure that the community partnership remains politically popular."

She also wanted to address some broader and more philosophic issues: "Not so long ago, I happened on a book by a British anthropologist who was seeking to understand or explain why large systems eventually run down or fail. He was using the Roman Empire as his example, although I think he was actually talking about the more recent demise of the British Empire. As systems age, entropy occurs, things run down, meaning that it requires more and more effort to maintain the usual essential activities until, finally, the system collapses or an enemy takes over.

This is not a digression. We have many familiar examples. Consider the Child Support Enforcement program, and the amount of effort and investment of the government necessary to ensure that children are financially supported by their parents."

Sudia then reviewed statistics regarding protection of children. "The *National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect* shows a 67 percent increase in the number of abused or neglected children from 1986 to 1993. That is twenty-three children per thousand who are abused each year. There are no differences by race, but the risks are significantly higher in:

- single-parent families
- large families
- those living in large urban counties
- those with low income

Families with income under $15,000 have much greater risks of all forms of abuse and neglect, including child deaths. CPS investigated only around 30 percent of the reported abuse, down from 44 percent in 1986. However, the number of investigations remained about the same, which is interpreted as an indication that the current system has reached its capacity."

"If we consider foster care, there are currently approximately 500,000 children in care, but since there are about 225,000 new entries each year, that means that three-quarters of a million children experience placement in one year. There is obvious bias in the race/ethnicity of the placements: 45 percent Black, 35 percent White, 11 percent Hispanic, 1.6 percent American Indian/Alaskan native, 1 percent Asian, Pacific Islanders, etc., with 4 - 5 percent other or unknown." While this system is at capacity, "the widespread use of relatives has increased its capacity while also providing a more friendly and less restrictive placement for the children. Since there is no ethnic bias in the incidence of abuse and neglect, it seems obvious that we should address those conditions which are related to incidence."

She also noted that the costs of child welfare have increased sharply. She cited Mark Courtney (*Public Welfare*, Summer, 1995) saying that AFDC costs doubled between 1981 and 1993, and Title IV-E costs of out-of-home care increased by a factor of twenty-five, from $309 million to $7.78 billion in the same time period.

Sudia said it is becoming too expensive to replace the natural system of parents rearing their own children reasonably safely and efficiently. She said the recent increases are attributed largely to the use of illicit drugs. "Of the 4 million women giving birth in 1992, 5.5 percent or 220,000, used illicit drugs. ...We know that 1.3 million individuals are in prison. Ten percent of these are women. Sixty-five percent of the men and 75 percent of the women in prison are parents."

She then made suggestions to keep in mind when building a community partnership. She commented that it "must involve active family planning programs, rehabilitation of parents: from prison, from drugs, from alcohol, from mental illness, from domestic violence, from homelessness, and from unemployment. The two-parent family must be made viable. This is not a complaint about single parents, but an observation that they need help."

"I would encourage broadening the community partnership to include the public housing authority, the transportation authority, the juvenile and adult justice systems, the courts, mental health services, and certainly employment training. One cannot solve the major problems of society without the assistance of all of the related systems. However, it will be difficult to access

these other systems. They have their own imperatives, and their own service or operating system. They will cite confidentiality, eligibility regulations, current demands, objectives already determined, and any number of good reasons why it will not be possible. When you track down their claims, you will find that they are all true. Congress, or the legislature, in their wisdom, have determined how the programs should work, who is eligible, and on what basis.

For years, I have been angry and annoyed with Congress for assigning different human services issues to different committees. CAPTA, the Child Abuse Protection and Treatment Act, is not part of Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, and there are inconsistencies between the two acts. They are handled by separate committees, which apparently do not communicate with each other. Mental health and substance abuse are under NIH (National Institutes of Health), which is generally the research wing, while Medicaid is also part of the Social Security Act, as amended. Obviously other committees address justice, housing, etc.

I have only belatedly come to realize that each of these areas, and their committees of the Congress are responsive to a particular set of advocates and professional organizations. The National Child Abuse Coalition, under the direction of Tom Birch, is speaking for a particular group of organizations, University researchers and other interested parties, and while they are certainly not inimical to child welfare, neither is it a central concern. The Child Welfare League, the American Public Welfare Association, and particularly its subsidiary, the National Association of Social Workers, and the deans of the Schools of Social Work may be more involved in the child welfare programs..."

Medical and mental health professionals support SAMHSA (the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) and National Institutes of Mental Health legislation. In other words, these are professional coalitions, each concerned about the eventual clients, but also each concerned with the conditions of employment of people like themselves."

Finally, she suggested that knowing this may make it "possible to allow for the differences when we seek to establish working relationships. ...possibly we can parallel the cultural competence programs and become more aware and competent to deal with the other professional points of view."

Response: Crafting a Community Partnership

Tony Wagner
President, Pillsbury Neighborhood Services

Steven Oates
Executive Director, New Unity, Inc.

Brian Guidera
Division Manager, Hennepin County Children and Family Services

Wagner:

> ***Synopsis:** Wagner stressed that a bottoms-up transformation is taking place in neighborhoods, which are rapidly becoming extremely diverse and which contain the desire to create meaningful lives. He protested that:*
>
> - *professionals need to re-examine their roles and not get in the way of communities' progress,*
> - *organizations must allow clients rather than programs to be the driving force behind actions, and*
> - *community organizations' relationships with major funders are not true partnerships because they are not equal relationships.*

Wagner said that a transformation in neighborhoods is taking place across the country and it is "a bottoms-up transformation. It's emanating from the community. Those of us who fancy ourselves professionals and part of the child welfare system need to understand that it is happening with or without us, and it will happen.... It is not about business, government and the non-profit sector. This is about what you recognized as the growing informal network of people who are responding to needs in their own way in their communities.'

He used two vignettes to illustrate this transformation. He noted that the Cedar Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis served primarily low-income white people five years ago, with a smattering of Southeast Asian and other peoples. Today the neighborhood has an extremely large population of East African immigrants, Somali, Ethiopian. He said, "Last night at our annual meeting, I'm struggling with names, faces, places, languages that I had never known...existed. ...I'm learning [to say hello and good-bye in] Amharric, Oromo, Somali. This is the world that we now live in."

One and a half years ago Pillsbury Neighborhood Services "tried an experiment" in which they gave a part-time maintenance person in their agency a job assembling wire cable in the basement of Unity House, thinking "we would get into this business of creating jobs rather than finding jobs." (New Unity, an organization affiliated with Pillsbury Neighborhood Services, focuses on neighborhood economic development and job training programs.) They began with one $12,000 part-time contract. Now they have a million-dollar business in a five-story warehouse with sixty-four full-time jobs for low-income people, "either on or experienced with welfare and represent[ing] predominantly people of color." ... "The energy, the will, the desire to create meaningful families and a meaningful life for people is there. Frankly, I think we have to understand our complicity, or collective complicity in...[keeping] that kind of energy from really growing."

In relation to the transformation, Wagner said he believes professionalism is changing, and professionals are "rapidly becoming the paraprofessionals in the business, the sort of sideline of the profession. We need to have a much better understanding of what the skills are that are being required to do the work that's going to happen and be necessary today."

He also stressed the need to allow the client rather than the program be the driving force of action. "This is a big issue in our agency. It's such a big issue that I have to think twice about using the word 'client'."

Finally, Wagner observed that in his twenty years of work in "this business of running a settlement house" he has been involved in endless meetings with the county, United Way, and other major funders, negotiated many contracts, but "can't recall being involved in one single partnership" with them. "It's not a partnership when my only choice in the negotiation is to take it or leave it. Too often that's the kind of partnership we've created in the system." At the same time, he noted that he has been in "many dynamic partnerships with many of my colleagues in the community and with many organized groups of people in the neighborhood. The dynamic is very different. When you're engaged in a partnership discussion with people who believe they have power and clout at the table, the outcome is very different than whether I sign the contract or not."

Oates:

> ***Synopsis: Oates described the growth of an economic development project in collaboration with Pillsbury Neighborhood Services and discussed:***
> - ***the reluctance he often sees to engage in true collaboration and creative thinking, and***
> - ***the need to get beyond meetings to taking action to provide jobs for welfare reform.***

Oates said that he and Wagner had shared frustrations with partnerships for a long time. He noted that child abuse is in part tied to the frustration of being unable to provide for one's family. He reported a conversation that ensued when he issued a challenge to Wagner. "'Tony, if you and the boys are serious about it, I think we should do economic development.'

Tony said, 'What do we think we really know about economic development?'

'What does anybody know about economic development? I think we have a couple of advantages. We have board directors at Pillsbury Neighborhood Services, all business people primarily, and we know other people. We've done this project, as he mentioned, in the basement of Unity House. Why don't we go out into the world of business and see if we could partner with a number of businesses in the community. Let's talk about light manufacturing and packaging, something that doesn't take a lot of capital, doesn't take a lot of equipment. There's a need.'"

Oates said they worked with an electronic company in St. Paul. "They said, 'What we want you to do is attach these wires.' It's what they call 'giving it value.' I'm a social worker of eighteen years, so I didn't know what they were talking about. One of our board members [explained]: you buy wire wholesale, you put your labor costs in it, you mark it up, you sell that and you make a profit.

I said, 'That's easy. We can do that.' Then I was on my way in the wire business."

They hired a manufacturing representative, and when the business started to take off, they "took people from north Minneapolis, ...anyone who walks in off the streets. ...as soon as we opened the doors, we had 100 applicants who wanted to work."

At this point they have five minority managers doing a good job. "They come to work every day, they're very happy from time to time with me, but I think that's a collaboration."

They are working with the County to help fund the business to create more jobs in association with welfare reform. The size of Pillsbury Neighborhood Services allows them to do some case management, dealing with child care, food, and other issues. "Partly, Unity is trying to get away from all the excuses that people may bring and say, 'This is what you need to do. You have no excuses. It's up to you.' At this point it seems to be working."

In reflecting on collaboration, Oates commented that most people don't want to work hard enough to "think outside the box." "That means you have to share power and authority. We really have not been trained to do that. It's very difficult to sit back and say, 'You may not have the proper English, you may not even have the right attitude, you may upset me, but let's negotiate....' The question I always have is, what do we mean by collaboration, and are they real? ...Is this not bringing people to a table and saying, 'What do you think?'"

He also noted that the fundamental issue in welfare reform is getting people off wel-fare and providing for daycare. He expressed impatience with excessive meetings and a belief that action must be taken. "I say, 'Why don't we just do?' We know what we have to do."

Guidera:

> ***Synopsis: Guidera discussed the tension between the need for a community-based response in order to effect change and the legal requirements of his department to respond to federal, state, and county mandates. He noted that they are developing community-based sites as part of an effort to facilitate welfare reform and to respond to the need for community-driven judgments about what is useful to communities.***

Guidera noted that, while the County is, of course, for community and partnership, they are also bound by federal, state, and county mandates. Their essential work is "to keep children safe and to provide permanency for those children where there's a need to remove them from their homes."

He also noted that there is always tension in a government system regarding how much partnership can be afforded, both financially and politically. The seven commissioners in Hennepin County make judgments about how to spend money based in part by what their constituents tell them.

The Department of Children and Family Services realizes that it cannot help a community change by opening case after case after case in Child Protection, and that "you don't make communities different or you don't help them to change by taking this child out, this child out, doing this over here and this over here. There has to be a community-based response. But you have to continue to do what the law requires you to do."

Guidera said part of their resources are devoted to community-based sites, and they have staff available to work with community groups, with partnerships. However, he does not believe "you can free up your workers sufficiently so they are no longer tied to the bureaucracy." He said, "You need to put people out in the community who are willing to engage with the community in a variety of different ways and take risks, and at the same time, at least plant inside their brains that a time may come when they have to disengage from our system if they want to continue to work out here, because all those boxes and rules that we have prescribed for us may cause personal tensions." He cited as an example that a worker cannot remove a child from a home because of poverty.

Guidera added, "Yes, we're committed to community, but I think it's the community-driven agencies, community-driven people, people who are in the neighborhoods, who are going to make the best judgments about what's useful, and they will begin to compel government agencies. ....That's the political process."

"The struggle that we have in representing the County, then, is how can we provide as much support to what appears to be a movement whose time has come? ...We're willing to stay engaged. We're willing to acknowledge that there is inequality of partnership when you have the dollars. We have to be taught in some ways. ...How do you get a more equal partnership? ...Give us certain parameters to work in so we can go back to our masters and say, 'Hey listen, we're not giving away the store. We're actually working within a certain structure.'"

Community Partnerships in Child Welfare: Challenges in Sharing Authority and Accountability

Charles Lindsey (Lynn) Usher, Ph.D.
Wallace H. Kuralt Professor of Public Welfare Policy and Administration, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and consultant to the Edna McConnell Clark and Annie E. Casey Foundations

Synopsis: Usher described common themes among three child welfare reform initiatives, and discussed community- and agency-shared authority and accountability in the initiatives. He emphasized the need for an investment in evaluation and the advantages of an ongoing, self-evaluation approach.

Usher prefaced his prepared remarks with three comments regard issues raised in the morning:

First, he brought a federal initiative to audience attention. The Title IV-E waiver demonstration program allows states to take savings in out-of-home care for children who are eligible for IV-E funds and divert them to home-based alternatives or other types of prevention programs.

Second, he noted that Minnesota is unique in that it does not face the restriction of resources faced by many other states.

Third, he said that the current system, essentially in existence since about 1970, is a system in which accountability amounts to the responsibility to make a report to another agency. If that doesn't work anymore, there is no reason why it can't be changed.

Usher began his presentation by discussing three initiatives:

- "Family to Family: Reconstructing Family Foster Care." Annie E. Casey Foundation. It represents neighborhood-based, family-focused foster care, and is being carried out in Baltimore, Birmingham, Alabama, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and the entire state of New Mexico.
- "Families for Kids." Kellogg Foundation. Its focus is to reduce the backlog of children who have been in foster care for more than a year. There is also a focus on families for children of color. It is being carried out in fifteen communities in Arizona, Colorado, District of Columbia, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, and Washington.

- "Community Partnership for Protecting Children." Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. This initiative focuses on flexible responses to child abuse and neglect that draw on informal community-based support. It is being carried out in Cedar Rapids, Jacksonville, Louisville, and St. Louis. [This initiative was also discussed earlier by Schene.]

Usher said, "One of the things that has helped to unify these initiatives is having adopted specific outcomes that they have adhered to and tried to keep their focus on those outcomes throughout the implementation of the initiatives."

Family to Family has focused on seven outcomes:

- Fewer children entering out-of-home care.
- Less restrictive care for children.
- Children placed in their own neighborhoods.
- Less disruptive care for children.
- Shorter lengths of stay.
- More children who experience reunification or other permanent placement.
- Fewer re-entries to out-of-home care.

While these concepts are not new, they have never been measured well. A major thrust of Family to Family was to get better information on these performance indicators. The intention was to dispel myths associated with conventional data based on "point in time snapshots" of the child welfare system. Much of the evaluation work has been to develop longitudinal data bases in order to track children throughout their experience in out-of-home care Usher said, "This gives a new perspective on how child welfare systems work and challenges some of the conventional wisdom.... For example, the notion of foster care drift is integral to child welfare. While I would not deny that there are children who drift through the system, that is more often the case for a minority of children rather than for the typical child. And yet, our systems don't treat those children as exceptions. ...The effort here was to put those children who were not well served by the child welfare system in proper perspective so that there could be a focus on their needs...."

Family to Family attempted to do this by building on the notion of partnerships, specifically between birth families and foster families in their own neighborhood. "...at the heart of Family to Family is the notion that we have to challenge the idea of "bad" neighborhoods. Just like we look for strengths and resources on the part of individual families, we have to look for strengths and resources in neighborhoods that we might have called 'bad.' ...their focus and their practice has changed so that it is less institutionally based and more neighborhood based and more family focused. That has been a significant part of the change in Family to Family."

Usher said they have adopted an evaluation approach which emphasizes self-evaluation. He believes a traditional approach to evaluation will not work in the context of these community initiatives because they are complex, involving family outcomes and bundled interventions that are specific to particular communities. He said, "I worry that the findings of no effect that were so common, and continue to be common in program evaluation, had less to do with the nature of the intervention and its real effectiveness than it had to do with the way we were doing evaluations." Self-evaluation is a "conscious transfer of authority and accountability to a body - that becomes self evaluating."

He emphasized the significance of the investment being made in building longitudinal data bases. The had to "create teams of people who formerly did not work together very well." This included 1) people who had programmatic perspective, 2) people who knew how to look at data and transform it into information, and 3) people who knew where the data could be found (program staff, data management staff, and data analysts). The self-evaluation team had to engage the management team or the community collaborative.

Families for Kids focused on five outcomes:

- Providing comprehensive family support.
- Assuring each child a single caseworker or case work team.
- A single family assessment for each family who comes in contact with the system.
- Single placements rather than multiple placements or disruptive care.
- Achievement of permanency within one year.

There are a wide variety of strategies being used by Families for Kids to reach these outcomes, and Usher talked about one from North Carolina. In eight North Carolina counties, they have created assessment teams to provide a single assessment process. In addition, they have created performance teams, which are essentially self-evaluation teams.

Assessment teams decide whether or not children will enter placement. The teams include the child welfare agency and different representatives within that agency, mental health, juvenile justice, any agency that is involved in the family's life, plus the family itself and people in the community who are significant to that family.

They are trying to establish accountability, creating a flow of information of different types and different perspectives with the assessment team having face-to-face interaction with the families. The teams are asked every six months to a year to evaluate what they are learning about the families in the community and how that knowledge can be used to transform the system. This information is fed to the local governing entity. Usher stressed the fact that this body is vested with decision-making authority and resource allocation authority.

The performance teams analyze data. The initial data base in North Carolina encompasses 25,000 children who entered out-of-home care for the first time from 1991 to 1996. They provide statewide data pertaining to patterns of initial placement, restrictiveness of care, length of stay, use of licensed care, disruptions in care, and re-entry rates. The data is updated semi-annually, and each county can look at how the experience of children has changed over time, and compare that to similar counties as well as to statewide totals.

Usher said the performance teams provide one perspective. "The assessment team contributes another perspective. And then the governance entity, with its concern for policy and resources, brings another perspective. It is the interplay among these different perspectives in the evaluation process, the budgeting process, the policy-making process, that we're trying to achieve in these counties in North Carolina."

Community Partnerships for Protecting Children focused on three outcomes:

- Reduced incidence.
- Reduced re-abuse.
- Less serious injury.

The strategies include flexible responses that use both family assessment and investigations. In many of the initiative's locations, an early decision is made whether an assessment or investigation is appropriate. Then families follow different tracks through the system. A second strategy is to acknowledge and draw on informal supports and community-based supports and services to deal with cases that now get diverted. This helps to deal more effectively with children who are on the fringe of the child welfare system. The final strategy is an emphasis on community partnership. Usher said, "I believe at the heart of community partnerships as it's being pursued in the Clark initiative, it is a negotiation of authority relative to child welfare and child protection. ...there is an explicit negotiation of those boundaries between the child welfare system and the community."

Usher noted that there are differences between professional and community perspectives on child abuse and neglect. He said there are three perspectives: the child welfare perspective; the perspective of other child,care professionals in the community; and that of the residents of the community. He referred to the *National Incidence Survey*, in which child care professionals, police and others in the community were asked to record the incidents of abuse and neglect of the children they observed. Twenty-eight percent of the cases were ultimately investigated. Some were never reported and some were screened out. Of the cases that were reported, two-thirds were not substantiated by the child welfare system.

Usher said, "To me, there is first a measurement problem... in terms of the way we're capturing information. Underlying it is really a different definition that prevails among different groups of people as to what is child abuse and neglect...you get into some of these communities, the risks that they perceive are gangs. There are other kinds of risks to the safety and health of children and it's only lower on the list that child abuse comes out."

At the heart of the Community Partnerships Initiative sponsored by the Clark Foundation is the attempt to gain a shared perception of what is being dealt with and how it ought to be dealt with. "If you're pursuing a community partnership for protecting children, how do you allocate your time and effort to addressing those issues of gangs and other risks to children beyond what would narrowly be defined as abuse and neglect within the child protection system? There is also the notion of professional perceptions of child abuse and neglect versus poverty. ...Community Partnerships is negotiating a new set of expectations on the part of the child welfare system, the community and professionals in the community, and then the folks who live in a neighborhood and community as far as what their responsibilities are."

Next Usher discussed the common themes across the three initiatives.

- First is the notion of local governing entities for neighborhoods and communities. The need for this grows out of the failure of government to be culturally competent and to incorporate cultural differences across communities into policy.
- Second is the need to finance family and children's services from flexible rather than categorical funds.
- Third is the need to create locally defined, comprehensive systems of supports and services. This requires each community to understand what its system looks like now, where its resources are invested and where they might be more appropriately invested, and understand how informal supports can be drawn on more effectively.
- Fourth is a family focus and an attempt to be community based.

- Fifth is the emphasis on public and consumer participation, both in the local governance process and in the delivery of services and decision making.

Usher said, "In almost every one of the initiatives that I've talked about, the child welfare agency has played a leading role in trying to move toward a more community-based child protection and child welfare system." Because the child welfare agency is the entity in the community that is vested with the authority to exercise the coercion associated with the child welfare system, it falls to the child welfare agency, and the county commissioners who are responsible for that entity, to share authority with the community. However, there will be no transfer of authority without accountability going along with that.

The partnership is accountable for child safety and well-being, but this is being understood in a new way. Child safety and well-being is being looked at in the context of family and community outcomes. Usher cited the example of Cleveland, where they determined that children being removed from one East Cleveland neighborhood resulted in a reduction of more than $270,000 a year in their state allocation for local education programs. "So there are many ways in which the child welfare decisions can have a community level outcome."

If neighborhoods and communities are to be trusted with authority to make child protection and child welfare policy and to allocate resources, there must be an investment in monitoring and evaluating outcomes. ...In most of the states in which I have been working, this is a very difficult thing to sell right now," Usher said. "The impulse is to put everything into direct service because resources are being cut back, and so you want to put everything that you have into things that have a direct impact on families and children. And yet, under this framework, the only way you can gain accountability is by making that investment."

Premises related to accountability and self-evaluation include the following:

- Community-based governance is more responsive and responsible.
- Our understanding and application of evaluation must be transformed from a "once-and-for-all event" to an ongoing process that involved mid-course corrections and continuous improvements in outcomes.
- Consumers of evuluative information can only engage in academic exercises if they lack authority and control over resources.
- Monitoring is not an evaluation and does not entail a degree of control necessary for evaluation.
- Evaluation is not auditing.

A Perspective from Families

Anne Hill
Ombudsperson for Families, Minnesota Department of Human Services

Synopsis: Hill presented questions which, based on her experience with families, seem to be the questions most urgent to them.

Hill began by saying she had been asked to talk about what the family's perspective is on the subject of the current reform efforts to emphasize a community-based child welfare system. Hill noted that a community-based child welfare system is not a new concept. In fact, ten to fifteen years ago, the community came to local government representatives in one of our larger counties with a request that child protection be approached from another direction. "Let the community be accountable to these families. One of the larger counties today has actually done some things that have been talked about today. As a result, that county also receives a lot of complaints. The majority of complaints our office receives come from that particular county. That may be the nature of change... In reviewing the complaints that come to my office from families, I think families would welcome a rethinking of the child welfare system. I believe it's the complexity of issues these families have that has challenged the system to change."

The questions Hill gets, routinely, from families are: As we are instituting these changes, are we going to acknowledge the families' mistrust and suspicion, questioning actions that we're taking for change or will this be a new way of perpetuating old attitudes? Is there a respectful way that we can change to ensure that families and children receive the quality support services, within our own state and between counties? She noted that there is a big difference between what support services a child gets in Lake County and what a child gets in Ramsey and Hennepin Counties.

She said families are going to want to know how community partnerships will be operationalized, and if they will be treated with respect. In the end, families will want to know who they can hold accountable, to whom they can turn when the system does not work. What efforts will we make to destigmatize a family receiving child welfare services, whether it be voluntary or involuntary?

Hill added, "And last but not least, ...and I couldn't live with myself if I didn't say something about it, the children who end up in these systems, by far, are children who look like me. ...there has to be a question on the cultural and ethnic repercussions of making these changes.... and why people from our communities ...might question such changes."

Hill then asked for questions.

Question: "Do you think it's possible to have a user friendly child protection system? I raise that question because every community meeting that I have attended has identified child protection in the most fearful terms, as well they might. Child protection is the most intrusive action facing a family... to be invaded... with consequences that might divest this child of their birth family. I think it is right that we treat it as we do, with fear and trembling. But, how does that play out with the concept of partnership? And, is it possible to make it friendly, or should it really be developed as the last fearful step that one has to take for families who simply cannot nurture their children? ... I think it's a rather fundamental question. If we're talking about community partnerships, the fact is that child protection is not a lovable intrusion. And should it remain so?"

Anne Hill: "I think part of what I was trying to get to in talking about destigmatization is really something we would have to do on this end ... and I think some of this is being done by putting community sites in our community. That's only one part of the first step. Much more will have to be done ... to make families feel, to not be stigmatized by the use of those services. I've seen families receive the same type of services ... [from] respected community programs and not feel stigmatized by it, ashamed or disgraced. Once the element of child protection comes in, there is a loss of dignity and integrity in an already fragile household. I think more has to be done on this end."

Question: [Not picked up well on microphone, but understood by Anne Hill, regarding user friendly services and at the same time, communicating that child abuse will not be tolerated.] The questioner then asked, "How is that mix going to come together?"

Anne Hill: "...quite naturally I get complaints where people say, 'My children shouldn't have been taken.' But many times I get complaints from family members who are saying, 'This was clearly a situation where we needed some intervention. This was just not the way to do it.' ...I get more than my share of complaints about families being sent to dysfunctional support services or programs, when they're already struggling, and they see no reason, and rightfully so, to go through a program that they, themselves, know is not meeting their needs. I don't want to say every parent, but I think there is a significant number of families out there who realize they need intervention in their life, or some kind of support in their life. We've just not been able to deliver the types and quality of supports those families really need.

Question: "Could you spend a moment and speak of the kind of comment and issues that cross your desk in terms of volume, nature ..."

Anne Hill: "... the majority of complaints that come to my office, right now, are family members who are not receiving the kinds of support they need to really care for their family members ... child care ... housing, that sort of thing."

Question: "Could you speak to the issue of advocacy. I know your office does not advocate for children, you're actually looking at how the laws are implemented and their performance, but for families who need advocates...could you speak to how that gap is being filled... or is it something we need to look at?"

Anne Hill: "I think that's a significant element right now that is missing, especially while we're having this dialogue about changing or rethinking child welfare. There isn't any entity in

place that will advocate for families and children [from their perspective]. We're so wrapped up in moving to change ... that we'll lose something if there's not that entity in place that will advocate... And our office can do some of that at a policy level, a rule-making level, and even at the legislative level ... There is a gap right now. You and I have talked about it, and it is something that needs to be addressed."

Comment by conference participant: The issue of cultural diversity should not be disregarded. "When I look around this room today, it's better than it has been for a long time. I think it's a major problem ... people get training and then they never use it... Somehow the people in Minnesota have got to get the idea that you're not always going to be dealing with white families. I think you know that already, but somehow, the idea of cultural diversity is moving slowly ... you're having a cultural revolution, if you will, in this State right now. First it was the Asians, now it's the Africans. I don'ts know who will be next. You haven't been able to work effectively with black families—that's happening across the nation. ...this morning, 45 percent of out-of-home placement kids are black. That says something to me. That's real scary... The message here is cultural diversity, and how you are going to deal with it. When I talk about cultural diversity, I'm not always talking race. I'm talking social habits.

A Thriving Partnership: CLUES (Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio) and Ramsey County Human Services

Jesse Bethke
Executive Director, CLUES

Jenny Gordon
Manager, Child Foster Care, Day Care, and East Side Children's Services, Ramsey County Social Services Division

Bethke:

> ***Synopsis: Bethke gave some history of CLUES, outlined its array of services, and discussed its relationship with Ramsey County and systems level ideas relative to transforming child welfare through community partnerships.***

CLUES was begun in 1981 by a group of Latino professionals and community members who recognized a problem with accessibility to institutional services for the Chicano Latino community. Bethke pointed out that professionals, social workers, and community people together, recognized that there was an important need that had not been met in Ramsey County and Hennepin County. ...for this critical mass of people to come together in 1981, in the context of a community that has been in Minnesota for many years, I think it's historic in that context," Bethke said.

The agency grew from probably less than ten staff in the 1980s to its current approximately fifty staff. Last year CLUES saw about 7,000 clients. Bethke noted that the Chicano Latino community is one of the fastest growing communities in Minnesota. It is also a rapidly changing community experiencing significant policy changes at the federal, state, and county levels. Forty-five percent of cuts in welfare reform were related to immigrant communities.

CLUES' mission is to enhance the quality of life for the Chicano Latino community in the metropolitan area. Services, provided in both Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, include: mental health, employment, education, chemical health advocacy, and a seniors program.

Bethke noted that CLUES' relationship with Ramsey County has always been excellent. He said, "I think the premise here is, while county government has a certain type of power,

community agencies will also bring a community perspective and community sense of power. The issue and our view is not necessarily power, but the issue of common ground." As an example, he cited a Children's Mental Health Consortium, which works with severely emotionally disturbed children. "This program came about in recognizing that there was a need for more community-based agencies of color to come together and to parallel those services that were being provided to the mainstream. ...the delivery point is closer to communities of color. One of the goals of the program is that case managers have about 50 percent of their caseloads with communities of color."

Bethke also said there has been a major change in outcome-based evaluation. For instance, a collaboration was formed two years ago among CLUES, three or four other communities of color agencies, and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota (another example of a successful relationship). University students help the agencies further develop outcome-based evaluation capabilities. He noted that United Way of St. Paul has undergone a major change in looking at outcome-based program services. "What I think this all speaks to from our standpoint are principles of stewardship, accountability and responsiveness to the needs of community."

"We see our work not only as building and growing the quality of life in the Chicano Latino community, but making that systemic relationship between our community and the greater community as well. ...I do want to underscore the point that stewardship, accountability and responsiveness are certainly the guiding principles that I think have worked well with nurturing a very important relationship with Ramsey County."

Gordon:

> ***Synopsis: Gordon also underlined the successful nature of the partnership between CLUES and the County. She also discussed the process and importance of forming community partnerships and espoused optimism about community ownership and partnerships.***

Gordon said, "I believe that the experience of CLUES and its development and its thriving that's been described by Jesse Bethke, my colleague, is a high level example of the kind of partnerships that have occurred over time in our County, and I'm sure in all counties—vendors that we value very highly. ...In Ramsey County we would like to move to a place where we encourage the development of such partnerships with all the providers with whom we deal."

Gordon said she believed the issues discussed during the day "lend themselves to strategies and mechanisms and solutions that can be found in this life, on this earth, in this country." She listed the issues as "the inherent power and equity that exists between the funder and the funded, the historical features that all community providers bring to the contract table in terms of the mission that has historically developed for each community-based provider, the bureaucracy with all its wrinkles and ramifications that I think were pretty eloquently alluded to by the panelist this morning, and the frustrations that spring out of dealing with the large organizational bureaucracies that we have in our counties."

She noted that over a year ago, the Social Services Division in Ramsey County developed an initiative to bring community stakeholders (i.e., Corrections, the Courts, the schools, repre-

sentatives from communities of color) to "hammer out some preliminary understanding of what the problems are, what the practice should be, what the outcomes are that people are looking for." After a year the task force has completed its work. "I think we will be able to move to the kind of community-based and public/private partnerships that have been alluded to by some of our speakers this morning."

While saying that she sees nothing wrong with a good contractual arrangement, she believes we need to move beyond the merely contractual to a different level—a level where one and one make more than two—in dealing with intractable problems such as poverty, drug use, neglect and abuse. She said, "There's some kind of synergy that occurs. ...It has happened in instances in Ramsey County. I believe it can happen as a general pattern."

She cited as an example one of the Annie E. Casey Foundation sites in Cincinnati which she visited a couple months ago. She said one of the two sites that had been in operation for quite awhile was clearly thriving in a more noticeable way than the other. When she asked people there how this happened, they talked about meeting over a period of a year to break down barriers. Initial meetings had been facilitated by professional, therapeutically-oriented facilitators. Although that had seemed like a long time to her, she said, "I sense in the room today a lot of feeling, a lot of issues, and it helped to clarify for me that a year was probably not too long to work on some of these inherent issues that have existed between the contractor and the contracted." Success was also attributed to flexibility, and the agreement to communicate.

She said, "One person told me, 'Everybody believes now in the concept of community ownership. People are dedicated and have commitment and belief in the Family to Family project.' Now you...do not often hear people speak in that kind of feeling language about their contractual arrangements. If anything, you're more likely to hear cynicism, aggravation, or simply facts. ...I was struck by these grown, middle-aged people talking about dedication, commitment, belief in the Family to Family project. Having been there, having seen that, having seen other fine examples in our own County about what can happen, I believe now that it can happen and it will happen."

Concluding Remarks

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Can the "community" accept the burden of Minnesota's policy for assuring the safety of maltreated children? "According to state law, the 'paramount consideration in all proceedings concerning a child alleged or found to be in need of protection or services is the best interests of the child.' But courts must also ensure 'reasonable efforts...to eliminate the need for removal (from the home) and to reunite the child with the child's family at the earliest possible time, consistent with the best interests, safety, and protection of the child'."*

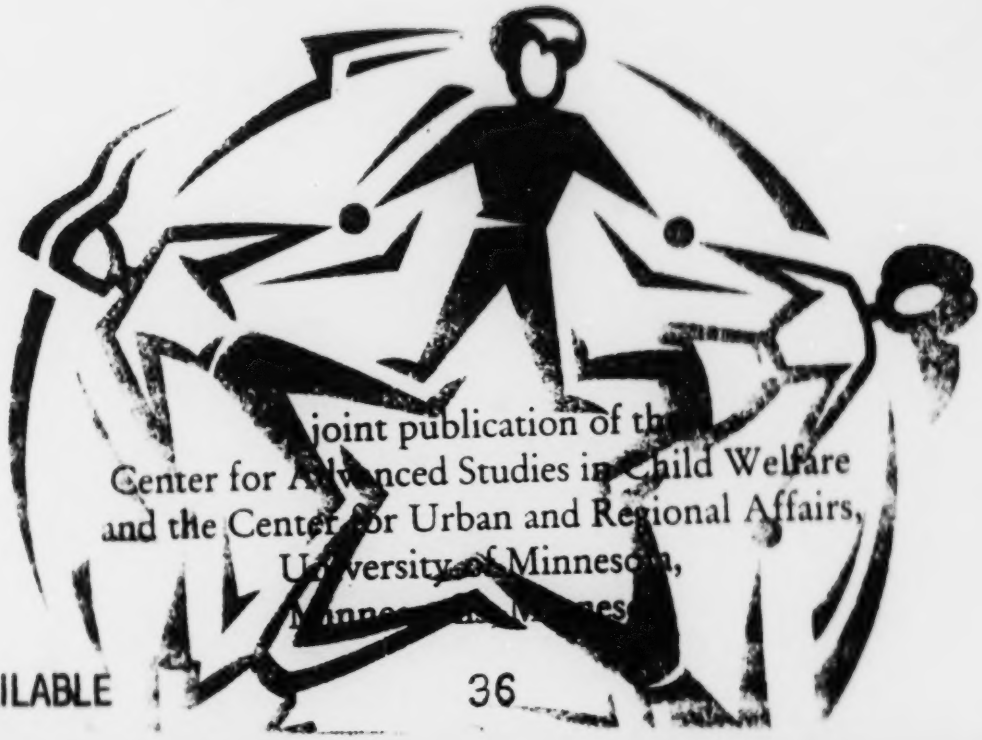
Public child welfare services are in a period of erosion, reflecting severe budget constraints. Limiting investigations through more restrictive screening procedures and narrowing the options for case openings are the responses to the underfunded system. The charge that child welfare has become an unresponsive system is prevalent. In some states child protection has become a police action. This is construed by community advocates as a major attempt to circumvent the protective service mandate, implied in P.L. 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act.

Under these circumstances, can we encourage the community to exert its role as "case finders" in a proactive outreach strategy, only to face an unresponsive public child welfare system in the grips of a fiscal crisis?

Certainly, the child welfare reform movement has grasped "community partnerships" as its most recent hope for improving the lives of families and children.

The most optimistic note was sounded by Patricia Schene: "We are in the process of developing a culture in which public child welfare and the community can learn together. We can certainly celebrate the experiments already underway, and encourage this work in progress."

* "Child Protection Services: Background Paper," Office of the Legislative Auditor, May 12, 1997.



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